NAXOS
A Guided Tour of
The Romantic Era
Volume 9

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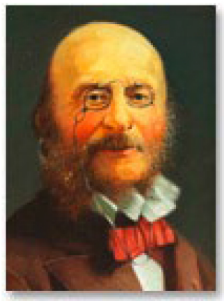


OFFENBACH, JACQUES (1819–1880)

The son of a Cologne synagogue cantor, Offenbach and his violinist brother Julius were trained at the Paris Conservatoire, though Jacques Offenbach left after only a year. He thereafter found employment as a cellist, initially at the Opéra-Comique. He developed a successful early career as a virtuoso on the instrument, for which he wrote a number of works, including a *Concerto militaire* and a Concertino. He was for five years conductor at the Théâtre Français, but in 1855 rented his own theatre, where his early light-hearted stage works were performed. His first, and perhaps his greatest success came in 1858 with *Orphée aux enfers* ('Orpheus in the Underworld'), an operetta that was phenomenally popular in its day, and continues to be well received. He continued a successful career devoted largely to operetta and *opéras comiques*, eventually being award the Légion d'Honneur by Napoleon III. With the advent of the Franco-Prussian War, Offenbach fell from favour in France, but continued to be popular elsewhere, especially in England and Vienna. He returned to Paris in the early 1870s, and regained his earlier popularity. In 1876 he toured America before returning to the French capital, eventually dying in 1880.

OPERA AND OPERETTA (Tracks 1-3)
Operetta, a form of music-theatre that neatly filled the gap between the weightier production of the Opéra-Comique and popular vaudeville, was essentially a development of the second half of the nineteenth century, a product of Paris. Of Offenbach's nearly 100 such pieces for the stage, *Orphée aux enfers* ('Orpheus in the Underworld') is best known, in particular for its famous can-can. Of a weightier cast is Offenbach's final opera, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* ('The Tales of Hoffmann'), completed after the composer's death.

VIEUXTEMPS, HENRY (1820–1881)

Henry Vieuxtemps attracted early attention as a prodigy, making his first public appearance as a violinist at the age of six. He later studied with Charles de Bériot and moved with him from Brussels to Paris in 1829. Two years later he embarked on the first of his concert tours, impressing musicians such as Schumann and Paganini. He took composition lessons with Sechter in Vienna and later with Reicha in Paris and wrote violin music for his own use on extended concert tours that took him to the major cities of Europe and, with the pianist Thalberg, to the United States of America. In a busy career, he continued to compose, appeared as a soloist in concerts, gave lessons and took part in chamber music recitals. In particular, he added a more classical dimension to violin repertoire. Beethoven's Violin Concerto was now part of his repertoire, and he also gave a performance of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, which was still a novelty. In 1871 he was appointed professor at the Brussels Conservatoire, where his pupils included Eugène Ysaÿe. He died in Algeria in 1881 after eight years of intermittent ill-health that had impeded his teaching and put an end to his playing.

CONCERTOS (Tracks 4-6)
Vieuxtemps occupies an important position in the history of the violin concerto, largely fulfilling his aim of infusing the concerto as Viotti had left it with music that made use of the newly developed technical possibilities of the violin. This achievement is demonstrated in his seven Violin Concertos. He also wrote smaller works for solo violin and orchestra, two Cello Concertos and a 'Duo brillant' for violin, cello, piano and orchestra.

CHAMBER MUSIC (Tracks 7-8)
Vieuxtemps wrote a number of pieces for violin and piano. These include operatic fantasias and variations on other well known melodies in a series of twelve Duos concertantes. These and other similar compositions provided topical material for concert tours, including a *Souvenir d'Amérique* based on Yankee Doodle and a *Souvenir de Russie*, as well as a Caprice on 16th and 17th century English airs. He also left three String Quartets and a Viola Sonata.

FRANCK, CÉSAR (1822–1890)

Born in Liège in 1822, Franck was originally intended by his father for a career as a virtuoso pianist, but he failed to achieve the necessary distinction as a performer. This relative failure as a virtuoso pianist and his marriage to Félicité Saillot Desmousseaux led to a breach with his own family. He continued to earn a living by teaching and as an organist, while slowly developing his powers as a composer. It was principally as an organist, with phenomenal powers of improvisation, that he was to succeed in Paris in these middle years of his life, with appointment in 1858 to the church of Ste. Clotilde. He drew to himself a loyal and devoted circle of pupils, including Vincent d'Indy, and in 1871 won some official recognition as the nominated successor of Benoist as organ professor at the Conservatoire. A man of gentle character, he exercised considerable influence through his classes and performances. From the mid-1870s onwards Franck devoted himself to composition, influenced in particular by hearing, in 1874, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, which made a profound and lasting impression on him. It was after his death that his work came to be appreciated by a wider public, while his influence on a whole school of French composers continued.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC (Tracks 9-11)
Franck's best-known orchestral works are the Symphonic Variations for solo piano and orchestra and the Symphony in D minor, completed in 1888 and first performed at a Conservatoire concert the following year. A brief series of symphonic poems includes the early *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* ('What is heard on the mountain'), based on Victor Hugo's *Le Chasseur maudit* ('The Accursed Huntsman'); *Les Djinns,* again after Hugo; and *Psyché*, a symphonic poem with chorus.

SACRED MUSIC (Track 12)
Franck wrote a number of large-scale choral works on biblical subjects, as well as smaller-scale works for occasional or liturgical use. This last category includes the well-known Panis angelicus of 1872, originally for tenor, organ, harp, cello and double bass. The Panis angelicus was later interpolated into the three-voice Mass of 1861.

CHAMBER MUSIC (Tracks 13-19)
Franck wrote one Violin Sonata, which, like his symphony, is united by a cyclic use of thematic material that connects the movements. There is also a fine Piano Quintet, completed in 1879 and a final String Quartet, written in 1890.

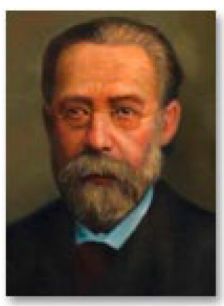
ORGAN MUSIC (Tracks 20-22)
As a very distinguished organist, Franck wrote remarkably little for the instrument on which his improvisations had won him fame and pupils. Organ compositions published include *Trois Chorals* of 1890 and *Trois Pièces*, written a dozen years earlier. The six organ pieces published in 1868 are entitled *Fantaisie, Grande Pièce symphonique, Prélude, fugue et variation, Pastorale, Prière* and *Final.*

PIANO MUSIC (Track 23)
Franck's earlier piano music was designed for his own virtuoso performance. Two later works remain in general repertoire: the *Prélude, choral et fugue* of 1884 and the *Prélude, aria et final*, completed in 1887.

LALO, ÉDUARD (1823–1892)

Lalo was born in Lille in 1823 into a family of Spanish origin that had long been settled in France. Early training at Lille Conservatoire in violin and cello was followed by a brief period of study in Paris with the violinist and conductor Habeneck, and private lessons in composition. In Paris, in independence of his father, who disapproved of his son's choice of career, he earned a living as a violinist and as a teacher, while continuing to write music. From the 1850s he was particularly involved in performance as viola player in the Armingaud Quartet, and later in his own quartet, ensembles that re-introduced to the French public the classical quartet repertoire of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. It was not until the 1870s that Lalo began to make an impression as a composer, with the performance of his Violin Concerto in 1874 by Pablo Sarasate, to whom the *Symphonie espagnole* of the same year was dedicated. This was followed by other orchestral compositions, including the successful Cello Concerto and a series of works for solo violin and orchestra. Still greater success came at last in 1888 with the production of his opera *Le roi d'Ys* at the *Opéra-Comique*, after a series of earlier operatic disappointments. He died in 1892.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC AND CONCERTOS (Tracks 24-25)
Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* is in fact a violin concerto of Spanish flavour, in five movements. Written in 1874, and first performed by the Spanish violinist Pablo Sarasate, it is a popular part of current violin repertoire. His Cello Concerto in D minor, written in 1877, enjoys less popularity but is perhaps of greater musical interest.



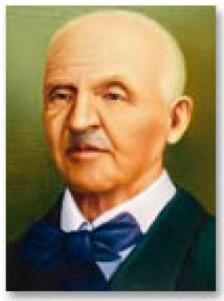
SMETANA, BEDŘICH (1824–1884)

Smetana holds an important place in the development of musical nationalism in his native Bohemia, where he was born in 1824. He showed early promise and wrote his first compositions at the age of nine. By 1843 he was supporting himself in Prague by teaching the piano. Smetana remained committed to Czech nationalism throughout his career, though it was interrupted by a period of self-imposed exile in Sweden after the political turmoil of 1848. After returning to Bohemia he began composing music for theatre, which included *The Bartered Bride* and *Dalibor*. He eventually became principal conductor of the Czech Provisional Theatre, but he had his enemies, and calls grew for his dismissal from the theatre. In 1874 he was forced to take a leave of absence as a result of his increasing deafness. In spite of this, he completed the opera *The Kiss* in 1876 and *The Secret* two years later. In 1881, at the opening of the new National Theatre, his opera *Libuse* was staged, while he continued to work relatively slowly on his opera *The Devil's Wall*. His health continued to deteriorate, with intermittent loss of memory and of speech. He died in May 1884, in an asylum in Prague.

OPERA (Track 26)
Smetana blazed a trail in his establishment of distinctively Czech opera. He wrote eight of them in all, though by far the best known is *The Bartered Bride*, the overture of which makes a brilliant opening to any orchestral concert programme. Sadly, his other operas have enjoyed less international success.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC (Track 27)
By some margin, the most popular of Smetana's orchestral works is the cycle of symphonic poems *Má vlast* ('My Country'). The work comprises six movements, of which 'Vltava' ('River Moldau'), which follows the historic course of the river as it flows towards Prague, is the most frequently heard. He also composed other symphonic poems, overtures and a 'Festive' Symphony.

CHAMBER MUSIC (Tracks 28-29)
Smetana wrote two string quartets, the first with the title 'From My Life'. There is a G minor Piano Trio and two short pieces for violin and piano under the title *From My Homeland*.



BRUCKNER, ANTON (1824–1896)

Bruckner, born in a small village near Linz in 1824, is known chiefly as a symphonist. He trained as a school-teacher and also served as organist in a monastery in Linz. He studied in Vienna with the famous Simon Sechter, who forbade Bruckner to compose a single note, in order to concentrate entirely on exercises. Bruckner obeyed, and it was not until he had finished his instruction with Sechter and took lessons with the conductor of the local opera, Otto Kitzler, who introduced him to the magical world of Wagner, that music poured out of him. Now forty, Bruckner composed his first masterpiece, the wonderful Mass in D minor, followed by two other great Masses and the Symphony No. 1. He was later appointed to succeed Sechter as Professor of Music Theory in Vienna. His success as a composer was varied in his lifetime, his acceptance hampered by his own diffidence and his scores posing editorial problems because of his readiness to revise what he had written. A fanatical admirer of Wagner, he was innocently dragged into the conflict between the followers of Brahms and those of his beloved Wagner. He made many enemies, the most cruel of whom was the critic Eduard Hanslick. He died in Vienna on 11 October 1896.

CHURCH MUSIC (Tracks 30-33)
A profoundly religious man, Bruckner wrote a number of works for church use, both large and small scale. Notable among the former are the *Te Deum*, completed in 1884, and various settings of the Mass, including the well-known Mass No. 2 in E minor. He also composed settings of various psalms and antiphons, including about forty motets. The famous *Locus Iste* numbers among these.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC (Tracks 34-39)
Bruckner completed nine numbered symphonies (10 if the so-called Symphony 'No. 0', 'Die Nullte' is included). The best known is probably Symphony No. 7, first performed in Leipzig in 1884; the work shows evident of the influence of Wagner. All the symphonies, however, form an important part of the late nineteenth-century symphonic repertoire.

STRAUSS, JOHANN II (1825–1899)

Johann Strauss II, the most famous and enduringly successful nineteenth century light music composer, was born in Vienna on 25 October 1825. Building upon the firm musical foundations laid by his father, Johann Strauss I and Joseph Lanner, the younger Johann (along with his brothers, Josef and Eduard) achieved so high a development of the classical Viennese waltz that it became as much a feature of the concert hall as of the ballroom. For more than half a century Johann II captivated not only Vienna but also the whole of Europe and America with his abundantly tuneful waltzes, polkas, quadrilles and marches. The appeal of his music bridged all social strata, and his genius was revered by such masters as Verdi, Brahms and Richard Strauss. The thrice-married "Waltz King" later turned his attention to the composition of operetta, and completed 16 stage works (among them *Die Fledermaus*, *Eine Nacht in Venedig* and D*er Zigeunerbaron)* besides more than 500 orchestral compositions — including the most famous of all waltzes, *The Blue Danube* (1867). Johann Strauss II died in Vienna on 3 June 1899.

STAGE WORKS (Tracks 40-41)
The younger Johann Strauss wrote some 16 operettas between 1871 and 1897. Of these the best known is *Die Fledermaus* ('The Bat'), characteristic in plot and music of Vienna at its most light-hearted. Other operettas are more familiar through dances extracted from them, although *Der Zigeunerbaron* ('The Gypsy Baron') remains second only to *Die Fledermaus* in terms of popularity.

DANCE MUSIC (Tracks 42-50)
Dance music by the younger Johann Strauss comprises waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, marches and other works. Among these the most familiar remains *An der schönen, blauen Donau* ('The Blue Danube'), originally a choral waltz-sequence. Strauss, like his father, was extremely prolific as a composer, writing several hundred dances in various forms.

Text by Keith Anderson, David McCleery, David Patmore and Caroline Waight